



# LIGHT RAIL PERMITTING CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

## ADVISORY DOCUMENT

### CONTEXT SETTING REVIEW PHASE - JANUARY 15, 2014

#### Introduction

The Light Rail Permitting Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was appointed by the Bellevue City Council consistent with the terms of the Light Rail Overlay regulations contained in the city's Land Use Code (LUC). Land Use Code section 20.25M.035.A describes the CAC purpose to:

1. Dedicate the time necessary to represent community, neighborhood and citywide interests in the permit review process; and
2. Ensure that issues of importance are surfaced early in the permit review process while there is still time to address design issues while minimizing cost implications; and
3. **Consider the communities and land uses through which the RLRT System or Facility passes, and set "the context" for the regional transit authority to respond to as facility design progresses\***; and
4. Help guide RLRT System and Facility design to ensure that neighborhood objectives are considered and design is context sensitive by engaging in on-going dialogue with the regional transit authority and the City, and by monitoring follow-through; and
5. Provide a venue for receipt of public comment on the proposed RLRT Facilities and their consistency with the policy and regulatory guidance of paragraph 20.25M.035.E below and Sections 20.25M.040 and 20.25M.050 of this Part; and
6. Build the public's sense of ownership in the project; and
7. Ensure CAC participation is streamlined and effectively integrated into the permit review process to avoid delays in project delivery.

\* Identifies the focus of this Advisory Document

Section 20.25M.035.C of the LUC guides the scope of CAC work to ensure that the Committee's intended purpose is achieved, and describes the CAC role as advisory to city staff who are charged with making decisions on the Design and Mitigation Permits required to approve light rail systems and facilities. The CAC work is intended to occur in phases that are roughly aligned with Sound Transit design phases and city permit review phases in order to achieve permit streamlining and consolidation objectives. For each phase of review, the CAC is charged with providing feedback in an Advisory Document, and city staff is charged with supporting CAC preparation of this work product (LUC 20.25M.035D.3). This written summary constitutes the Advisory Document for the Context Setting Review Phase per item #3 above.

## Context Setting Review

The work product required following the Context Setting Phase of CAC review is intended to provide “context” to which Sound Transit should respond when designing elements and features of the East Link light rail system and facility, and by which permit compliance should be judged. The work of the CAC during this review phase was informed by three CAC meeting topics.

At its first meeting on October 24, 2013, the CAC toured the Central Link project to familiarize CAC members with project elements that support the Link light rail system and its associated functions, and common design features used to mitigate project impacts. At its November 20 meeting, the CAC reviewed context setting material samples assembled by city staff from presentations to and feedback from the Arts Commission and Light Rail Best Practices Committee. On that same night, Sound Transit staff presented the 130<sup>th</sup> Station design package to the CAC to determine if the submittal provided an appropriate level of detail or whether additional information was necessary for CAC members to evaluate compliance with policy and design guidelines during later CAC review phases. At its December 4<sup>th</sup> meeting the CAC toured the Bellevue subareas through which the East Link alignment, as it was approved by the Sound Transit Board and the Bellevue City Council, will pass. Members of the CAC were able to develop a more comprehensive perspective of the future alignment and its significant features, and the present context in Enatai, Surrey Downs, the commercial areas east of 112<sup>th</sup> Ave SE, Downtown, Wilburton, the vicinity of Lake Bellevue, and in Bel-Red.

## Context Setting Advice

On December 18<sup>th</sup>, the CAC considered the context and design considerations that were provided in LUC 20.25M.050.B, and offered additional input that should be considered for each subarea through which the East Link alignment is proposed to pass. The context and design considerations from the Land Use Code together with the additional input provided by the CAC has been organized by subarea and general alignment sections and presented below for ease of reference. This constitutes the CAC Advisory Document on the Context Setting phase of its review, and will be used to determine whether the proposed design and mitigation complies with the context sensitivity provisions of the Land Use Code.

1. Southwest Bellevue Subarea (LUC 20.25M.050.B.1). In addition to complying with all applicable provisions of the Southwest Bellevue Subarea Plan, the design intent for the RLRT system and facility segment that passes through this subarea is to contribute to the major City gateway feature that already helps define Bellevue Way and the 112th Corridor. The RLRT system or facility design should reflect the tree-lined boulevard that is envisioned for the subarea, and where there are space constraints within the transportation cross-section, design features such as living walls and concrete surface treatments should be employed to achieve corridor continuity. The presence of the South Bellevue park and ride and station when viewed from the neighborhood above and Bellevue Way to the west, as well as from park trails to the east, should be softened through tree retention where possible and enhanced landscaping and “greening features” such as living walls and trellises. Design features

for the alignment passing through this subarea and for the East Main Station should include landscaping that provides dense screening when viewed from residential areas and visual relief along transportation rights-of-way while maintaining sightlines that ensure user safety. Design features should be incorporated to discourage vehicular drop-off activities adjacent to the single-family areas. The character of this area is defined by:

- a. The expansive Mercer Slough Nature Park;
- b. Historic references to truck farming of strawberries and blueberries;
- c. Retained and enhanced tree and landscaped areas that complement and screen transportation uses from residential and commercial development; and
- d. Unique, low-density residential character that conveys the feeling of a small town within a larger City.

The CAC advises that the following additional context and design considerations should be considered when evaluating the East Link project in the Southwest Bellevue Subarea for context sensitivity during future CAC permit review phases.

- e. The alignment transition from the I-90 right-of-way to the South Bellevue Station should be reflected as a “Grand Entry” into Bellevue. This gateway area defines Bellevue as the “City in a Park.” The gateway serves a number of functions, and should appropriately greet the different users that pass through it, including transit riders, vehicles, residents, visitors to the Mercer Slough Nature Park, bicyclists from the I-90 trail, fish (specifically salmon), and wildlife.
- f. All structures located at the South Bellevue Park and Ride and Station should be designed to express a strong ecological connection to Mercer Slough Nature Park.
- g. The South Bellevue Park & Ride garage should incorporate green/living walls and trellis structures on the roof level in addition to interesting concrete surface treatments to break down mass and scale, and to help blend the garage into the Mercer Slough Nature Park when viewed from the neighborhoods to the west and the park to the east.
- h. References to Southwest Bellevue’s truck farming history should be incorporated into the South Bellevue Station and Parking Garage.
- i. Along 112<sup>th</sup> SE design treatments and mitigation should be complementary to differing levels of development intensity that exist on the east (commercially developed) and the west (residentially developed) sides of the road.
- j. The portal and tunnel between the East Main and Downtown Stations present an opportunity to “Visually Transport” transit riders from the historic mid-century modern, stable neighborhoods of Southwest Bellevue to the bustling urban context

of the Downtown. Art on the portal and in the tunnel could help depict the transition from the suburban context to the urban context.

- k. Landscaping should be employed to soften the impact of the portal structure adjacent to the East Main Station. If art opportunities are employed, additional emphasis on the concrete mass of the East Main portal structure should be avoided.
  - l. Wayfinding at the East Main Station should include “youth friendly” information for riders who will be accessing Bellevue High School.
2. Downtown Subarea (LUC 20.25M.050.B.2). In addition to complying with all applicable provisions of the Downtown Subarea Plan, the design intent for the RLRT system and facility segment that passes through this subarea is to enhance Downtown Bellevue’s identity as an urban center that serves as the residential, economic, and cultural heart of the Eastside. The above-ground expression of the Downtown Station is envisioned as a highly utilized urban “place” with an architectural vocabulary that not only reflects and communicates the high quality urban character of Downtown as a whole, but also complements the immediately adjacent civic center uses including Bellevue City Hall, Meydenbauer Convention Center, the Transit Center, Pedestrian Corridor, and the Downtown Art Walk. The alignment crossing over I-405 will be prominent to visitors entering, leaving, and passing through the Downtown, and its design should be viewed as an opportunity to create a landmark that connects Downtown Bellevue with areas of the City to the east. The station and freeway crossing should reflect Bellevue’s branding, and should be comfortable and attractive places to be and experience, with high quality furnishings and public art that capitalize on place-making opportunities. The character of this area is defined by:
- a. Private entertainment and cultural attractions;
  - b. High quality urban amenities such as pedestrian oriented development and weather protection that encourages people to linger and not just pass through;
  - c. High rise buildings that attract a creative and innovative work force;
  - d. Multifamily developments that attract urban dwellers that are less tied to their vehicles to accomplish day-to-day tasks;
  - e. Great public infrastructure including roadways, transit and pedestrian improvements, parks and public buildings; and
  - f. Stable property values that make it a desirable place for businesses to locate and invest.

The CAC advises that the following additional context and design considerations should be considered when evaluating the East Link project in the Downtown Subarea for context sensitivity during future CAC permit review phases.

- g. The Downtown Station should convey a sense of arrival at a bustling economic hub that provides access to retail, visitor services, offices, and urban residential neighborhoods.
  - h. The station should convey a future focus on smart growth, and the importance of transit to the success of sustainable development.
  - i. The aesthetics of the station roof should be taken into account and finished to enhance views down on the Downtown station for adjacent high rise and convention center development.
  - j. Clear connectivity, accessibility, and wayfinding should be provided between the Downtown Station, the Bellevue City Hall site, and the Bus Transit Center.
3. Wilburton/NE 8th Street Subarea (LUC 20.25M.050.B.3). In addition to complying with all applicable provisions of the Wilburton/N.E. 8th Street Subarea Plan, the design intent for the RLRT system and facility segment that passes through this subarea is to focus on the hospital station's role as a gateway location to points east of Downtown on to Bel-Red and beyond. The alignment crossing over I-405 should create a cohesive connection between the Downtown and hospital stations, but the hospital station itself should have its own identity. With significant ridership anticipated to be generated from the Medical Institution District to the west, the hospital station should take design cues from the hospital, the ambulatory health care center, and the medical office buildings that were designed to be responsive to the Medical Institution Design Guidelines that are shaping the character of this area. The character of this area is emerging and design guidelines envision an area defined by:
- a. Outdoor spaces that promote visually pleasing, safe, and healing/calming environments for workers, patients accessing health care services, and visitors;
  - b. Buildings and site areas which include landscaping with living material as well as special pavements, trellises, screen wall planters, water, rock features, art, and furnishings;
  - c. Institutional landmarks that convey an image of public use and provide a prominent landmark in the community; and
  - d. Quality design, materials, and finishes to provide a distinct identity that conveys a sense of permanence and durability.

The CAC advises that the following additional context and design considerations should be considered when evaluating the East Link project in the Wilburton/NE 8th Street Subarea for context sensitivity during future CAC permit review phases.

- e. Height of the flyovers (freeway, 116<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, and NE 8<sup>th</sup>) between the Downtown Station and the Hospital Station presents unique opportunities and challenges.

- i. Design attention should be given to the under-portions of the flyover structures that will be visible from vehicles and pedestrians that pass underneath them.
  - ii. Required railings on the flyover structures could present an art opportunity if they could be employed without further emphasizing the mass of the structure.
- f. The aesthetics of the Hospital station roof should be taken into account and finished to enhance views down on the station for adjacent development on Midlakes Hill to the east and future development anticipated in the Wilburton Village.
- g. Clear connectivity, accessibility, and wayfinding should be provided between the Hospital Station and the Medical Institution District where Overlake Hospital and the Group Health Ambulatory Care Center are located.
- h. Weather protection should be provided on the route between the Hospital Station and the Medical Institution District.
- i. References to the freight hub and rail platform that served Bellevue's historic truck farming industry should be incorporated into the Hospital Station.
- j. Physical connections and clear wayfinding should be provided between the Hospital Station and the regional trail proposed for the old Burlington Northern Railroad right-of-way.
- k. The Hospital station context should convey a sense of institutional permanence and quality that is broader in focus than accessibility to health care.

4. Bel-Red Subarea (LUC 20.25M.050.B.4). In addition to complying with all applicable provisions of the Bel-Red Subarea Plan, the design intent for the RLRT system and facility segment that passes through this subarea is to foster a new path for Bel-Red that is directed toward a model of compact, mixed use, and "smart growth" that represents a departure from the area's historic industrial roots. The 2013 context provides only glimpses of the future that is envisioned for this area. As a result, the public investment in light rail infrastructure provides an opportunity to reinforce the future outcomes that are desired for the area. The desired future character of this area is undefined by current development, but the Bel-Red Subarea Plan envisions a condition that is defined by:

- a. A thriving economy anchored by major employers, businesses unique to the subarea, and services important to the local community;
- b. Vibrant, diverse, and walkable neighborhoods that support housing, population, and income diversity;
- c. A comprehensive and connected parks and open space system;

- d. Environmental improvements resulting from redevelopment;
- e. A multimodal transportation system;
- f. An unique cultural environment;
- g. Scale of development that does not compete with Downtown, and provides a graceful transition to residential areas farther to the east; and
- h. Sustainable development using state of the art techniques to enhance the natural and built environment and create a livable community.

The CAC found the context and design considerations for the Bel-Red Subarea in LUC 20.25M.050.B.4 to be very thorough. The CAC advises that wayfinding to and from the 120<sup>th</sup> Street Station should receive special attention to ensure that pedestrians are able to easily locate the station within the larger Spring District complex.

5. General Alignment. In addition to the subarea specific context advice provided above, the CAC advises that the following context and design considerations should be taken into account across the entire East Link alignment.
  - a. Art should be used to tell the history of Bellevue
  - b. Stations and associated features and amenities should be accessible to all users.
  - c. Signage and wayfinding should create continuity across the alignment and individuality that helps define and enhance specific points of interest along the alignment.
  - d. Light rail through Bellevue should be a “two way experience” for riders, and opportunities for art, design, landscaping and architectural detail should be considered when viewed from trains traveling to both Redmond and Seattle.
  - e. Visual simulations of sensitive view sheds (such as views of the South Bellevue Parking Garage from Mercer Slough Nature Park and Enatai) would be useful for assessing context sensitivity during future phases of CAC review.

### Next Steps

The advice contained in this Advisory Document should be forwarded to Sound Transit for use in refining its design of elements and features of the East Link light rail system. This advice should also be shared with the Arts Commission as they evaluate arts opportunities and commission art associated with the East Link project, and with Wright Runstad as the company progresses in the design and development of the Spring District project. Context setting completed by the Light Rail Permitting CAC may also help inform development of character profiles during future work undertaken as part of the Station Area planning program.